Journal of Global Citizenship & Equity Education
Volume 2 Number 2 - 2012
journals.sfu.ca/jgcee

What Kind of Global Citizen is the Student Volunteer?[1]

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Keywords: Aid World; Volunteering; International Service Learning; Global Citizenship; Gift Economy; Political Selfhood; Collective Interdependence

ABSTRACT: College students in the United States, and other countries of the Global North, are signing up in growing numbers to volunteer with aid and human rights organizations around the world (and also domestically). Yet in so doing, many students experience their best intentions muddied by the inefficiencies or profit-motives of the aid world volunteer industry. To explore the dilemmas raised both for students and for faculty and staff supporting them, this essay reaches beyond the instrumentality of the aid world (its focus on doing something concrete and good) to other possible outcomes of the encounters between volunteers, aid workers, and aid beneficiaries. I conceive of the "volunteer-aid beneficiary" encounter in ways that draw simultaneously on the anthropological approach to "gift economies" as well as related concepts and arguments made by social psychologists, a philosopher, and a literary critic. The goal here is to contribute to the pedagogy supporting college students' service learning or volunteer experiences (mostly international, but also domestic) and to explore possible meanings of the term "global citizenship" in this context. I argue for the need to foreground the political selfhood of aid beneficiaries, alongside (or not merely) their economic or biological selfhood.

Anthropologist Erica Bornstein describes the spontaneous impulse to help a suffering stranger as an act of "freedom." She opens her 2009 essay, "An Impulse to Philanthropy," with a story of her young son's response to beggars on the street in New Delhi. She writes, "The impulse of philanthropy is spontaneous and has its own beauty: when giving is unregulated, it becomes deeply moving, an act of freedom" (p. 623). I can identify. I, too, have little children who were born in the United States and who (in my case) return with me each year to Bombay/Mumbai, and together we have had our share of street encounters. Waiting at a traffic light, they will ask me about those who appear at our taxicab window, begging. "Why are they poor?" my then 4-year-old asked on one such recent trip. I let my inadequate reply (perhaps I said, "Some people in the world are poor," or

[1] Thank you to the Global Poverty and Practice Minor program of the University of California, Berkeley's Blum Center for Developing Economies (especially its undergraduate students, Education Director Ananya Roy, and former Director of Student Programs Alexis Bucknam) for inspiring this essay. I am also very grateful to Nilgun Uygun, Munis Faruqui, and Lydia Boyd for their generous and insightful feedback on earlier drafts, as well as to the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions.

"The government is not taking care of all its people here") become garbled by reaching into my bag and rustling through for the Cliff's Kids Z-Bars that had been carried all the way across the Atlantic to stave off their every hunger pang. These I handed to the two young girls and the baby they held at our taxi window. My little one's eyes grew wide and she launched us into a conversation all the way to our destination noting that they were very hungry, how it was hard for their parents to find food for them, probably, how it was nice that we were sharing what we had, how they could eat something now, how we didn't need those Z-Bars for ourselves anyway, how we had more at home if we wanted. As Bornstein notes, giving the Z-Bars to the children at our taxi window without too much deliberation felt okay; it felt better than not giving them anything or doing anything, and certainly better than continuing to wonder about the question, *why* are they poor (or, why are *they* poor)? This essay will explore further, among other things, her characterization of this as an act of freedom.

Throughout this essay we remain focused on the form taken by the philanthropic impulse in the volunteer aid industry, especially considering college students in the Global North who participate as volunteers (often overseas). Bornstein would suggest that in the aid industry the impulse to philanthropy is institutionally regulated and thus its freedom is quite utterly obliterated. This essay will offer instead another understanding of what might constitute freedom for these student volunteers,[2] as well as for us – the faculty, staff, and development practitioners working with them. An alternative understanding of freedom, I will suggest, might be reached if global northerners are willing to consume the aid volunteer industry creatively, in turn allowing us to conceive of global citizenship in a very particular way.

I will reckon that many college students are very familiar with the obliteration of a simple desire to "reach out and help", to "make a difference" in another less fortunate life. Many have sat through classes that detail the histories of colonialism and then modernization, and classes that pick up, consider dourly, and then toss aside the goals and pretensions of most development planning. Yet at some point in their earlier education—perhaps as far back as elementary school—they were drawn to the call: you can do good in this world, and to the suggestion: you should work to serve others. So many young school children in the United States—indeed, in middle class school settings all over the world—will enthusiastically participate in efforts to raise money for a particular cause (cancer research, or the most recent natural calamity). Such civic-minded extra-curricular projects are considered by most of us an integral part of school life, and teachers and parents carefully inculcate the disposition to engage in them. But on the subsequent journey our students and children discover, to their dismay, that "doing good" (Fisher, 1997) is not a straightforward matter; it has a history and a politics and in many cases it is doomed to reproducing the world's inequalities (or at best it does little to counter these), in which they themselves are implicated and positioned. The philanthropic impulse of the middle classes, it would seem, is not merely obliterated in volunteering; it is revealed to be misled.

[2] The main thrust of Bornstein's essay is less about freedom as such and more about the "regulation" of the free impulse to help another. Her essay explores the layers of meaning within which acts of charity are embedded, specifically in the Indian context. She focuses on new forms of practice emerging in India where middle class aid work (underpinned by a liberal entitlement and rights regime) intersects with Hindu notions of religious gift giving (*dan dharma*). Later, as I return to the topic of freedom, I will refer to a scholar cited by Bornstein herself, James Laidlaw (2002), who calls on anthropologists to theorize freedom and bemoans the lack of production of an anthropology of freedom as such.

Yet it is hard today not to be struck by the growing number of college students seeking to do something themselves toward meeting the UN's Millennial Development Goals (MDG) to "end poverty and hunger," provide "universal education" and child and maternal health, enable "gender equity" etc. by 2015. But the post-MDG world and its discursive milieu of global citizenship together place these students in a deeply ambivalent situation.[3] For on the one hand, they are called upon to put themselves out there, spending time in places and interacting with people and organizations; and they often do so with the genuine desire to be of concrete help. On the other hand, for many reasons, their efforts are often thwarted. For example, the short time spans they spend on their volunteering or the sloppy structure provided to them by organizations means that, wittingly or unwittingly, many are little more than "student development tourists" (Hudgins 2010). Moreover, volunteering in the Global South feels uncomfortably painful for many who thus learn first-hand about the world's inequalities, about the deprivations of the majority of the world's populations, and about their own relative fortune and affluence. And some students have downright unpleasant experiences with mediating (volunteer placement) organizations whose profit motive, they cannot help but notice, overshadows any actual aid work.

The aid world is purportedly set up to serve those deemed necessary beneficiaries of aid. How these beneficiaries actually fare at the hands of the aid world is an urgent topic (much debated), yet not the focus here. Rather, I attend to the aid world as it presents itself to colleges and universities in the guise of extra-curricular learning opportunities. I dedicate this essay to all those college students (so many of my students among them) who are moved to work on some aspect of social inequality in the world, such as the lack of access to health care, clean water and sanitation, housing, a clean environment, or citizenship status. By exploring creative consumption of this volunteer industry and reflecting critically on "global citizenship," I write also for fellow teachers whose task it is to guide student volunteers.

Rethinking the Goal of Helpful Volunteering

Since there is no single training ground for these large numbers of student aid world volunteers (this being a marketplace and not John F. Kennedy's Peace Corps), the option to volunteer – and this is especially applicable to international placements – ends up appealing to different students in different ways and for different reasons. Some believe their nascent engineering and medical knowhow ought to be available to every citizen of the world, everywhere, and they are energized

[3] The UN Millennium project has foregrounded the poverty analytic, which now takes the place previously occupied by the related terms 'development' and 'modernization'. Despite its seeming technical underpinning (see Ilcan and Phllips, 2010) and despite the various discussions of how to complicate the measurement of poverty (see Booth, Leach, and Tierney, 1999), the poverty framework divides the world into two parts, the poor versus the not-poor. And just as the development/modernization analytic justified and encouraged moves by the 'developed' to help the 'developing' and the 'underdeveloped', so now the not-poor are encouraged to help the poor (see the work of critical development studies scholars such as Arturo Escobar, James Ferguson, Akhil Gupta, Michael Watts, Gillian Hart, Tania Lee). Both sets of terms generate an active donor giving something to a passive recipient; they disregard (many have persuasively argued the current aid climate actively undermines and condemns) how and when "the poor" take social transformation into their own hands (see the writings of Frances Fox Piven). Such technical discourse is flourishing precisely in this neoliberal era when nation-states are deprived of funds and their capacity for legislating social change and financing social welfare and infrastructure are undermined.

by the task of taking its benefits (de-worming medicine, improved cook stoves and latrines, maternal health care, water sanitation habits and techniques) where it is not easily available. Others are motivated by a religious or spiritual (or humanist) energy to relieve suffering somewhere or somehow to repair the harmony of the whole. Still others act on the conviction that injustice has been done for decades or centuries to some populations of the world and they seek to work with them to redress these injustices; or, they are determined to fight for social justice and against oppressive and powerful systems in places where their effects are felt most keenly. Some students have already formulated a sense of self that is closely linked with a particular struggle – say, to protect the environment, or to fight for gender equality or for human rights – and they travel overseas to extend and participate in this struggle. Many today in the U.S. are journeying to their parents' or grandparents' place of origin, seeking as college students to connect with their "roots" or to give back to the country from which their family hails; and then many are eager simply to travel abroad and "do some good" while they are at it. For some of these travelers, international experiences are sought as a way to take a break from the rat race of student credential-building and career-seeking, to learn about the world and meet and interact with people overseas to help clarify life goals; for others, overseas volunteering itself counts as a credential. Of course, today there are also those whose attention is fixed on redeeming the market, who believe in the power of entrepreneurs to creatively harness market forces to social ends or in the possibility of making corporations socially responsible. So also, there are those whose interest in the market economy direct them to more expressly macroeconomic approaches, or political-economic approaches; these students would like to repair the broken apparatus of foreign aid, third world debt, and domestic subsidies, placing a pro-poor mission cleanly centre stage in the worlds of international relations, diplomacy, and banking.

This multiplicity of motivation and projects is bewildering for teachers and staff who work with these students. As a teacher myself, I am sometimes tempted to view student volunteers as simply resume-building, tacking on grand-sounding international exposure and international NGO-work to their list of achievements. Other times, I am overwhelmed by the depth of their desires to engage the world and their striving for perfect venues in which to do so. How can such longings be met? Does the world really have thousands of places, perfect diving boards awaiting a volunteer from the Global North who can be launched into thoroughly useful action that will bring someone out of poverty, or find redress for a violation, or bring modern health care where there is none? Or (for me, this is more sinister) is the apparatus of the aid industry itself remaking the world so as to offer up more and more such places?

Given the growing numbers of student volunteers in the aid industry, one might assume a certain clarity of purpose has emerged – that a certain set of obligations has crystallized around a new notion of global citizenship. Surely to be participating in such large numbers is to be acting at least on the conviction that a college student can and must do something in whatever part of the world demands it, and that the something is worthwhile. Yet, students, and those of us working with them, are plagued by all manner of questions: What is the best thing to do? Is it useful? How can we ensure our volunteer experience is rewarding? Even more vexing questions follow: Who exactly counts as "poor," or, as the sufferer of inequality or injustice (who decides, and how)? Who exactly should be a beneficiary of aid, and then who exactly should assume the role of delivering that aid? What about the obvious pitfalls of thinking in these categories of aid receiver and aid deliverer? After all, some college students themselves hail from poor backgrounds or are recipients of financial aid; and yes, some are troubled by the whole aid framework and reject what they see as

the NGO-ization of social movements for change,[4] struggling instead for the far more difficult goal of identifying collective action in which they might participate.

The phenomenon, however, will not go away despite the most trenchant critiques of it. Students from the Global North are volunteering, domestically and overseas, in large numbers. At least as a starting point, I believe we can say, however, that it is the aid industry that is set up with concrete goals in mind, inciting volunteers to come make a difference. This incitement to act on others' behalf, however, is most often hasty and misled. And so I wish to make a case here instead for us to consume the volunteer aid industry, if we do so at all, creatively.

Perspectives on the Impulse to Act for/with Others

Let us return to Bornstein's "philanthropic impulse" and note that it must be prompted in historically and culturally specific ways and contexts. So, in contemporary Bombay it might be prompted by moments such as the arrival of a person begging at the window of a car or taxi stopped at a traffic light. This is a more or less daily occurrence in a city like Bombay whereas it would be rare in the United States – though now and then we might find ourselves eye to eye with a person or pair of individuals sitting or standing on a road divider at a traffic light, usually with cardboard signs broadcasting a fact or two of their situation and putting forward a plea. (It would be another essay to theorize the difference between these two phenomena.) In urban commercial districts in the United States, the philanthropic impulse might be prompted when a person emerging from a restaurant with a doggy bag of restaurant food comes upon a homeless man outside on the street, and hands him the bag.

If the prompts for this impulse are contingent, so also the impulse is regulated (as Bornstein's essay suggests) in historically and culturally specific ways. Muslim shopkeepers and restaurateurs in many parts of the world will feed the poor on Fridays, often on the pavements before their stores. Such a sight is a regular weekly feature in Muslim neighborhoods in Bombay, for example.[5] Bombay also offers several vestiges of a British charity model, continued from the colonial period. In the Bombay of my childhood, I went to the church-run Pavement Club on Friday afternoons where children who lived on the streets around the Victoria Terminus railway station came to play ball, to share a donated meal, to bathe, to receive first aid. As for the auto-rider/beggar encounter at traffic lights in the Global South, any impulse to philanthropy it might stimulate is regulated by middle class myths that circulate about criminal beggars, crafty children in the employ of powerful underworld dons, manipulative, ungrateful beggars, lazy beggars who refuse an honest day's work, and so on. In the United States, too, of course, there is every size and shape of soup kitchen, charity institution, service delivery non-profit, free clinics offering legal aid or health care. So also, there is fair trade shopping and aid contributions facilitated by the internet, and there is the NGO industrial complex and the volunteer opportunities it offers[6] – the latter being the focus here.

[4] See Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (2007), an edited volume that discusses what is lost (in terms of radical visions of change and accountability to the people involved) when social movements register themselves as non-profits to enable raising funds and soliciting donations.

[5] This even happens on Telegraph Avenue in Oakland, in which milieu it appears as unfamiliar and perhaps out-of-place, prompting curiosity, questions and explanations.

[6] See Redfield and Bornstein (2009) and Bornstein and Redfield (2011). Redfield and Bornstein lay out a three-fold typology of the aid world (development, humanitarian aid, human rights).

However, to speak of a "philanthropic impulse" as such in the singular – and merely its moments of prompting, and then furthermore its regulation, as contingent and plural – is to conceive of it as something pre-social, pre-cultural, as somehow fundamental to being human (ingrained in our psyche and part of our evolutionary behavior). At this point, it is worthwhile to recall how the word "philanthropy" is defined. Sure enough, while the Merriam-Webster dictionary's second meaning talks of humanitarian acts or gifts, and the organizations who make them, its first meaning is "goodwill to fellow members of the human race; *especially***:** active effort to promote human welfare."[7] The former (the familiar one) seems particular to highly industrialized society with its corporate foundations and their philanthropic missions. The latter general meaning (the lesser assumed one), however, is more easily adapted to what I can conceive as universal – in the spirit of anthropological gift scholarship. "Goodwill to fellow members of the human race," it seems to me, needs to be stretched and kneaded only a little to make it fit within the rubric of "moral economies." It also evokes Adam Smith's concept of "fellow feeling" and the political philosophic scholarship to which that concept gave rise.

French anthropologist, nephew of Emile Durkheim, and earliest theorist of the gift, Marcel Mauss (2000/1950) famously described the three fundamental obligations of economic life when it is organized around gift-giving: the obligations to give, to receive, and to reciprocate.[8] These, he sought to demonstrate, were universal (though in modern societies they have been transformed almost beyond recognition, existing in no more than trace-form, if at all, in the tax codes), and presumably emerged therefore from some universal human behavior. As an anthropologist, Mauss wrote in a descriptive and analytical way about actually-existing practices that he saw as supporting his insight about the three obligations of economic life that featured in all human societies. For Mauss, the three obligations that structured how people related to each other, and built relations with each other via things were so fundamental as to amount to a "total social fact," a set of processes that tied all aspects of social life together or that could be explained through any aspect of living, from the cosmological to the mundane.

Prosociality, Not Philanthropy?

Working more recently and in a different discipline, the social psychologists Paul Piff, Michael Kraus, Stéphane Côté, Bonnie Hayden Cheng, and Dacher Keltner (hereafter Piff et al.) deploy another category; they speak not of social "obligations" to give, receive, and reciprocate but rather of an individual's "prosocial behavior" (2010). Their material is not so much collective meanings and shared social practices, but rather micro-behaviors and individual responses observed in a staged experimental setting. Based on such experimentation, they argue that "lower class individuals" (defined by Piff et al., amongst other things, as having fewer resources and as

[7] Merriam-Webster m-w.com. 2011. http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/philanthropist?ref=dictionary&word=philanthropy# (accessed July 25, 2011).

[8] Mauss' main contrast in *The Gift* was between gift exchange and the modern Western exchange subject to the modern contract. He wanted to show that, absent of a modern contract, many (perhaps he believed, all) societies practiced elaborate and customary rule-shaped exchanges. Later theorists have developed the contrast in terms of gift exchange versus commodity exchange, more clearly outlining how Mauss' work can be brought into conversation with Marxist scholarship. For further scholarship on the gift, see the works of Chris Gregory, Nancy Munn, David Graeber, Katherine Brown, and others.

experiencing greater exposure to death and a reduced sense of personal control) demonstrate greater prosocial behavior (that is, for Piff et al., greater willingness to be socially connected with others) than do "upper class individuals." Furthermore, "lower class individuals" are more compassionate and more generous and helpful to others, including to strangers. As for "upper class individuals" (for Piff et al., those who experience their own lives as generally comfortable, safe, and who have a general faith in the possibility of their future comfort and safety), the authors suggest they are just as capable of prosocial behavior, but in their case "compassion" has to be specially induced (in this series of experiments, it was manipulated experimentally, by having participants watch a poignant video on child poverty). In terms of a "baseline compassion," however, they conclude that "lower class individuals" simply rate higher, requiring no manipulation to demonstrate prosocial behavior.

These are stark observations, working with very clear-cut categories (might there not be individuals who do not fit cleanly into either the "lower class" or "upper class," for example?) and offering in conclusion a startling contrast between those categories. Furthermore, the conclusion flies in the face of the common wisdom that it is the rich who more readily – or, are more readily able to – help others (usually the poor), whereas the poor may be assumed to be miserly, needing to look out for themselves. Certainly, this social psychology experiment suggests that in a class-segregated and hierarchical society (such as modern capitalist societies, but also including older large-scale and complex societies), the talk of universal impulses to help others is a complicated matter indeed.

For our present discussion, I would like to highlight something else that this article brings up: our apprehension of our collective interdependence.[9] For the Piff et al. study suggests that lower-class individuals act prosocially with less inhibition and more consistently (perhaps more as an enduring habit, or inhabiting a prosocial habitus, if you will), because they act on a gut feeling (conscious or unconscious) of their own interdependence. And, on the flip side, their study implies that it is in such an understanding of interdependence that upper class individuals appear lacking.

We might say that Piff et al. are describing people (for them, "lower class individuals") who are not so much attached to a view of themselves as autonomous beings but rather enjoy another view of themselves, as tied up in webs of interdependence, as needing other people perhaps at some indefinite point in the future or as having relied heavily on people in their past and present, and as being indebted to those other people to extents impossible to "repay." So also, Piff et al. seem to suggest that upper-class individuals do not view themselves as interdependent in the same way; they enjoy a view of themselves as relatively autonomous, indeed such a view is actively nurtured and independence of all kinds is aspired to. Of course, close relations with family and friends are

[9] I work here with Jameson's 1986 use of the term "collective interdependence," and will return later in this essay to discuss it more fully. The notion of interdependence is also theorized within anthropological discussions of the self. Marilyn Strathern's work (1984, 1988, 2004) on personhood in Melanesia and on non-Western "partible selves" has inspired a scholarship on selfhood, or self-representations, in different settings (see for eg. Piot 1999), demonstrating alternatives to the Western liberal representation of the autonomous person such as the notion that selves are incomplete, partial, in themselves, imbricated in the selfhood of others, and also context-specific. (See also Ewing (1999) for a comparison of psychoanalytic and anthropological discussions of self. Ewing suggests that individuals in all cultures are apt to deploy different context-specific selves, "multiple selves.")

valued but always also with a stress on independence. This valuing of independence is buttressed by social expectations of independent behavior (starting as early as sleeping habits and elementary school social norms) and social requirements of independent achievement and coping (scholarly, professional, and otherwise). When prosocial behavior (specifically, compassion) is thus induced in upper-class individuals, it cannot emerge from some understanding of interdependence, since this is underdeveloped or repressed here (suggest Piff et al.); rather the compassion is of a different quality – it is such as one might feel for a victim, a sufferer, someone in need of assistance. For to need another's help is to have failed to cultivate sufficient quantities of one's own autonomy or independence. Such compassion is a one-way transaction, not premised on any assumptions regarding what the person assisted might give in return, nor invested with the possibility that the two transactors share intertwined fates or inhabit a shared social-political space.[10]

As such, and if we can take Piff et al.'s "upper class individuals" to include all those of us who are able to put food on the table and who feel more or less assured of a future of doing so, both for ourselves, and for our children – if, in other words, we can take their category to apply also to the majority of students who attend four-year colleges and to the faculty and staff who work with them – then we might also wonder whether our volunteer efforts in the aid world, our engagements with organized projects of alleviating poverty and inequality, are not also constrained within a "one-way transaction" frame and whether the challenge of volunteer work for us is precisely our struggle to experience our volunteering as something other than a service by "us" to "them." Piff et al. suggest that the problem, if so, arises from our very comfort; for it is vulnerability and uncertainty about the future that generates, according to them, a lived prosociality among "lower class individuals," actions done for and with other people. I would venture to say that the recognition of one's relative privilege and affluence is indeed the most painful lesson learned by so many college students who seek out volunteering experiences, domestically and overseas.

Learning Prosociality as a "Larger Loyalty" through Volunteering

Consider another essay, this one by philosopher Richard Rorty (2000) who contrasts not so much the lower class and the upper class, but rather the individual in hard times versus in times of affluence. Rorty explains why and how our loyalties change when times go from hard to comfortable.

A main concern for Rorty in this essay is the idea of universal human rights; he is skeptical of this abstract idea's power to move humans to act. For the most part, he writes, humans do not tend

[10] This point – that upper class individuals feel and substantially live their own interdependence less than do lower class individuals – is arrived at differently by anthropologists Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (1989) who suggest that, whereas most societies demonstrate beliefs and/or practices for relating the short-term (and individual) transactional order to the long-term (and group-level) transactional order and for subverting the former to the latter, in contemporary capitalist societies such ways of imagining how individual transactions ought to be subverted are lacking or impoverished. In other words, Bloch and Parry suggest most societies feature arenas of short-term transactions focused on individual gain (such as those of the bazaar or the give-and-take between neighbors); yet all but contemporary capitalists societies do a fairly good job prioritizing the arena of long-term transactions focused on reproducing the social order (such as marriage, other collective rituals that involve exchange of resources, housework, child care, restoring environmental balance, and so on).

to act on such abstract and universal notions of justice. In this belief, he stresses how he is at odds with Immanuel Kant who viewed justice, in its abstractness and large scale, as emerging from an exalted form of reason. Kant contrasted such a reasoned justice from "loyalty," which, in his view, was merely a matter of sentiment. For Kant, moreover, our morality (our exalted and abstract sense of justice) starts out thin in our youth and thickens with age. Differing with him on all counts, Rorty supports Michael Walzer's position instead. Walzer argues, "... morality is thick from the beginning, culturally integrated, fully resonant, and it reveals itself thinly only on special occasions, when moral language is turned to special purposes" (cited in Rorty 2000, p. 47). In this spirit, Rorty makes a case precisely for the power of loyalties (over abstract ideas of justice) to motivate us to act. Rorty suggests that even little children are quick and open to identifying sides, to placing themselves on one particular side, and to feeling and acting for that side; Rorty further suggests that a loyalty to one's family group and one's school group or city can move us from early in our youth. What is more, these loyalties underpin an early, thick morality that is demonstrated in the "detailed and concrete stories you can tell about yourself as a member of a smaller group", whereas thin morality shows up in the "relatively abstract and sketchy story you can tell about yourself as a citizen of the world" (p. 48). Where Kant lays out a progression over time from a thin, small-scale, sentimental morality to a thick, high-minded, near-universal and rational morality, Rorty (building on Walzer) more or less inverts that progression. He puts more faith in the morality that is based on sentiments felt for the relatively small groups of which we are a part (Walzer's "thick morality") – first that of our family members and then progressively larger circles around us such as our school and neighborhood, our town, all fellow Argentinians, all fellow Muslims, and so on. We are much more likely to act, he says, on loyalties to groups of which we feel ourselves to be an integral part rather than to act in the name of an abstract notion of what is just and proper for all human beings. To the possibility of feeling part of a "community of all humankind" and acting, with loyalty, on such a sentiment,[11] Rorty seems to suggest this is rare.

I must add, and not merely in a footnote, that both Rorty – via Walzer – and Piff et al. do not account for emergent groupings. In other words, they fail to tackle the political arena where, for example, colonized peoples, or peoples dispossessed in any particular society, may mobilize together, finding common cause against an oppressor, thus deliberately expanding their "in group" in response to particular circumstances. Hard times can generate new and larger groups of fellow strangers, especially for those experiencing a shared injustice. And so also as Edward Said (1986) notes in a provocative reading of Michael Walzer's fuller writings, a focus on our loyalty to specific communities is immediately suspect if and when it is premised on deeming others in another community to be outside, marginal, or in any way less than a full human being – in this spirit, Said is suspicious of Walzer's particular, albeit left/liberal, commitment to Zionism.[12]

[11] See the provocative Michael Perry (2000), who argues that for an individual to be moved to act for any and every other human being, in other words to feel a part of the "community of humankind," the individual necessarily must subscribe to a "religious cosmology."

[12] This is a nuanced reading specifically of Walzer's book *Exodus and Revolution*, but also with reference to his famous book *Just and Unjust Wars* and his other writings. Said describes Walzer as a progressive or leftist Zionist intellectual, but also ultimately as having a "peculiar" slippery position that Said finds deeply troubling. "[Walzer's] is at bottom a position retaining the vocabulary of the Left, yet scuttling both the theory and critical astringency that historically gave the Left its moral and intellectual power. For theory and critical astringency, Walzer has substituted an often implicit but always unexamined appeal to the concreteness and intimacy of shared ethnic and familiar bonds, the realism, the "moral" responsibility of insiders who have "made it." Still, as I have said, if like the Canaanites you don't happen to qualify for

Nonetheless, for our purposes here, the point we are taking away is that actually-existing groups united in a shared set of experiences and circumstances, be they formed "organically" or politically, fire up loyalties and thus passionate action in a way that abstract commitments to universal groupings do not and cannot.

It is thus that Rorty arrives at two key points within his main argument: (i) that "justice" is not something distinct from "loyalty," as Kant would have it; rather, it is merely a "larger loyalty," a loyalty felt for larger groups, on rare occasion for all of human kind (p. 47); and, (ii) that it is only in times of relative affluence and comfort that humans can afford to indulge in those loyalties to the largest groups. And conversely, "The tougher things get," he writes, "the more ties of loyalty to those near at hand tighten, and the more those to everyone else slacken" (p. 45). For Rorty, thus, the morality that is based on an abstract sense of justice for the abstract, universal human is a privilege of the comfortable classes. Again, he would suggest such a universal morality is felt, if at all, only transiently, and moreover only by the relatively comfortable who do not feel (or can take for granted) their dependence on the more finite, relatively knowable groups (for example: their fellow citizens) of which they are a part.

We must stretch both Rorty's essay and the Piff et al. study in order to connect them. Indeed, on the surface, they seem at odds, with Rorty arguing that the affluent can more readily commit to a morality that encompasses every single human being in the world while the Piff et al. study reveals that upper-class individuals tend to be less compassionate to their fellow human beings. It is worth our while to dig a little deeper, however, as I would like to show how both can be usefully applied to our discussion of the growing numbers of U.S. college students doing volunteer work in communities other than their own.

Despite their different terminology and the seemingly different conclusions at which the two essays arrive, both seem to suggest that something changes with affluence or with a customary comfort and absence of worry about the future. For Rorty, with affluence comes the possibility of distancing oneself from that thick morality, the one that is narratable in full, detailed, and emotive stories, and a greater tendency to embrace a thinner morality, narrated in abstract terms and directed toward large groups, all of the world perhaps, including people whom one does not know and may never meet. This thinner morality, we might say, is not necessarily undergirded by actually lived socio-political interchange and intimacy. For Piff et al., prosocial behavior becomes compromised by affluence such that upper-class individuals show less compassion to their fellow human beings. What Rorty does not actually say, but what Piff et al.'s social psychological study concludes in no uncertain terms, is that affluent people are less given to help a fellow person in need who is right in front of them whereas poorer people are more willing to help such a near-at-

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membership, you are excluded from moral concern. Or, in Walzer's other surprisingly disparaging, dismissive judgment, you are relegated to a mere cause, like the FLN intellectuals" (p. 104). And later, he writes: "The strength of the Canaanite, that is the exile position, is that being defeated and "outside," you can perhaps more easily feel compassion, more easily call injustice injustice, more easily speak directly and plainly of all oppression, and with less difficulty try to understand (rather than mystify or occlude) history and equality." Said believes Walzer shows suspicious preference for organic communities over political movements built on alliances and mobilized by particular causes. For his part, Walzer (2006) criticizes his theologian colleague Michael Wyschogrod for not being critical enough of the necessary carnage involved in building one's Promised Land – What of those vanquished? Are they not innocent others, dehumanized?

hand, flesh-and-blood fellow being. So also, what Piff et al. do not say, but what Rorty says in no uncertain terms, is that people suffering hard times are less likely to be moved by abstract principles of justice for all humans, or for all citizens of a particular country, but they will nonetheless act readily on thickly felt loyalties that they extend to people they view as like them (part of their group) in any particular moment.

Bringing their categories and conclusions together, we might ask some suggestive questions: Is it the case that an abstract and thin morality (to fight injustice in the world, for example), being a principle rather than a lived habitus, translates with more difficulty into immediate action than does a thicker lived morality (to help your kith and kin, for example)? Could we take away from this that the conditions of relative ease require a conscious rekindling of our prosociality through, say, our creative consumption of the aid volunteer industry? As development scholar Ilan Kapoor (2004), drawing on Gayatri Spivak (1990, 2003), puts it: "Development may indeed have become a shady business, but this does not mean one cannot retrieve from within it an ethico-political orientation to the Third World and the subaltern" (pp. 15-16).

For though quite different in their methods, terminology and argumentation, both Piff et al. and Rorty can be read to imply that the affluent do not feel a sense of being interdependent in real, material ways with others. It is, after all, an understanding of interdependence that moves less affluent, or lower class, people to help a fellow stranger. In her classic 1975 book, anthropologist Carol Stack made a very similar argument, drawing on ethnographic work in a poor African-American neighborhood in Chicago. Stack showed that residents in this neighborhood were willfully caught up in webs of interdependence, doing favors for each other, borrowing and loaning objects and money, helping with child care and housework. Her fieldwork on the high levels of exchange is often cited as evidence of a "gift economy" in urban poor neighborhoods in the United States. Gift economies, after all, are broadly defined as economies where material life is marked by a high degree of non-market exchanges between people who feel themselves to be reciprocally interdependent (Gregory, 1982). In such economies, people consciously and unconsciously assume that they are, or may be, dependent on others for their everyday needs. As a result, this understanding or gut feeling of one's interdependence with others makes the act of helping another person a very sensible and even automatic thing to do, since it could very well be oneself who may need that same help tomorrow. The action here is less based on individual rational thinking and emerges more from a shared habitus, or set of norms and feelings about oneself and one's social grouping. By contrast, the affluent do not feel that they inhabit such interdependent worlds and, with gut feelings of interdependence thus absent or repressed, their capacity to view others as simultaneously beneficiary and resource is compromised, this in turn undermining the impulse to extend concrete help to a fellow stranger.

These essays suggest that our relative comfort and our fetish for self-reliance and independence inhibit our apprehension of human interdependence. We can choose to take from them also this: that it is precisely an apprehension of our interdependence that we might anticipate learning about in the context of volunteering in the aid world. Note, however, that Piff et al. state that upper-class individuals can be actively persuaded to help another, but when they are, they tend to help more in the spirit of a benefactor and less as a fellow traveler. So also, Rorty states that people enjoying relative affluence are precisely the ones most able to answer a call made in the name of abstract justice, or loyalties to the human race at large. And both essays imply that when she or he does so, it is less from the sense of helping another because "tomorrow it could be me"

and more as the privileged helping the underprivileged, as a one-way and unequal transaction. Yet, even so, if our compassion is compromised, both because of our inability to feel our collective interdependence and such that it seems more like pity, can we not entertain the possibility of transforming it on both counts? What could this mean for our students contemplating their stint of domestic or international volunteering in the aid world?

I would like to turn to consider one final source, a 1986 essay by literary theorist Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," before returning in my conclusion to these questions. I do so because in it Jameson talks of "collective interdependence" in the process of reflecting on the encounter between the "West" and the "Third World." As such, I hope to show how this essay is very suggestive for thinking about the social encounters generated by the spaces of humanitarian aid and development around the world.

Our Privilege as our Impoverishment

Where Piff et al. talk of upper-class individuals, and Rorty talks of people enjoying comfort and affluence, Jameson's essay speaks in terms of the West (versus the Third World).[13] In his essay, more broadly, Jameson discusses how the West reacts to Third World texts (such as a telenovella from Argentina, or a Bollywood film, or a novel by a Nigerian writer). When Westerners are confronted with things emerging from the Third World, Jameson writes, they tend to feel as though they are confronting (reading, experiencing) something un-modern, something such as might have existed in their past. For example, the melodramatic telenovellas feel like 1950s American TV shows, or Bollywood music feels like the Hollywood musicals of the 1930s and 40s; they seem somehow lacking and old-fashioned. These Third World texts make Westerners squirm or laugh in embarrassment.

For our purposes here, consider how Jameson compares with Rorty and Piff et al. on the compromised compassion of the comfortable classes – for him, the impoverishment of the West. In discussing how Westerners tend to read Third-World texts, Jameson suggests that the West is impoverished in being inward-looking, unable to comprehend and appreciate the perspectives generated within the Third-World, and in its privilege even rendered fearful of those other perspectives. We can extrapolate from Jameson's discussion to our context of U.S. college students versus their less privileged fellow citizens or versus citizens of the Global South. When U.S. college students *visit* poor neighborhoods or places in the Global South, they feel they are in un-modern or half modern or forgotten places, places still stuck in a period now part of the past for us in the West, or places that were overlooked and neglected. The term "developing country" suggests places still in process, "half baked" (as Booker Prize-winning novelist Adiga writes irreverently of contemporary India in his 2008 novel). Thus if we compare Kampala to New York, or Cairo to Los Angeles, or the Berkeley and Oakland Hills to West Oakland, then Kampala and Cairo and West Oakland seem to be lagging behind, aspiring, trying to catch up.

[13] Jameson was criticized by some (see Ahmed 1992) for, among other things, his use of the terms 'West' and 'Third World'. Yet he maintained that for us here in the affluent West, or in developed countries, the 'Third World' does serve occasionally as a single unit of thought, even as we know it is woefully inadequate.

It is this apprehension we cannot help but have – this view that there are those half-baked, less-developed parts of the world (some in our very backyard), places defined by their lack of things and by their lagging behind us – that is, for Jameson, "humanly impoverishing" (66). If we stretch Jameson's discussion (arguably in a way he fully meant it to be stretched), we can take him to be suggesting that if our upbringing in a developed country or our aspiration for a middle class life undermines our ability to understand the ways of life in countries outside the affluent West, or the ways of life of people in poor neighborhoods, if we're only able to experience those ways of life as lacking and backward and un-modern, then it is our lives that are impoverished; then we are poor. Poor, Jameson means, in an experiential sense – our experience of our humanness is impoverished because it is blinkered by comfort and ease.

This, in my opinion, is a remarkable point, and Jameson moves on from it to work through the older remarkable idea from which it is derived, that of Hegel's ironic reversal of Master and Slave. Working with a similar reversal, we might say that in the world of student volunteering, it is we (the student, the faculty and staff, the development practitioner) who are poor in our understanding. In the encounters generated by the aid world, we struggle to make sense of what the world looks, seems, and feels like to those who in all their heterogeneity are labeled the beneficiaries of aid.

Jameson is not moralistic, however, in his discussion. The perspective of the First World, or of the comfortable classes, he points out, is "perfectly natural, perfectly comprehensible"; yet, he adds, it happens also to be "terribly parochial." He writes: "There is nothing particularly disgraceful in having lived a sheltered life, in never having had to confront the difficulties, the complications and the frustrations of urban living, but it is nothing to be particularly proud of either" (p. 66). He suggests that our views and responses toward the less affluent make sense, springing as they do from our upbringing, our experiences living in relative comfort, learning to aspire for a comfortable middle class life. There is no reason for shame in this. Yet, nor also does being affluent grant a person the right to serve as guide or helper to aid beneficiaries (for example), for there is no reason for pride either in the chance circumstances of our birth and in our relatively sheltered, comfortable lives.

Furthermore, Jameson suggests that our upbringing instills in us a fear "about the way people actually live in other parts of the world – a way of life that still has little in common with daily life in the American suburb." Our tendency to view life in poor countries or in poor neighborhoods as backward, he says, is in fact only the outer face of an inner fear of lives that are lived so differently from that of middle class U.S. lives. On the surface, our judgment of the non-West and of the poor as a work in progress, needing (our) help, seems reasonable or sympathetic, but this judgment masks what is really a deep fear of how people actually live in vast parts of the world. The fear, he suggests, is related to our:

> […] sense of our own non-coincidence with that [Other], so different from ourselves; our sense that to coincide in any adequate way with that [Other ...] we would have to give up a great deal that is individually precious to us and acknowledge an existence and a situation unfamiliar and therefore frightening – one that we do not know and prefer not to know. (p. 66)

Let us dwell a moment on the fear of which Jameson writes and on his unnerving suggestion that this fear is part and parcel of the process of relating to people less well off than ourselves. We

might thus bring a new lens to bear on the street encounter with which this essay began and on its image of the needy presenting outstretched hands to the not-needy. We might also shed light on college students volunteering in the aid industry, domestically and in other countries. Jameson offers the insight that when we interact with people whose circumstances are so different from our own, we recognize that to build a connection with such an individual may involve a very large sacrifice on our part. First, we struggle to understand their view of the world; we begin to recognize that to see their neighborhood or dinner through their eyes, to live their work lives in the way that they do, to become, in other words, a bit more like this less affluent Other, we would have to give up a great deal that is precious to us. And this potential loss of familiar comforts, of the ability to take such comforts for granted, is frightening. Jameson seems to suggest that we do not need so much to fret about being properly generous when confronted by another's need, rather we need (also, or perhaps more importantly) to reflect upon the depth of our attachment to our own comforts – for that attachment is usually very deep indeed. It is this attachment by which we are impoverished.

Conclusion

There are some threads yet to tie up in order to conclude this essay. For it seems that with middle class/First World comforts comes a tendency to be a pitying benefactor. We tend to more easily love the abstract human, but not the flesh and blood neighbor, the stranger near at hand. We are deeply attached to our comforts. What lessons are there here for all of us and particularly for college students volunteering in the aid world? As consumers of the volunteer experience, can we approach the planned experience in ways that complicate the benefactor/giving approach? Here, in conclusion, I will explore two possibilities.

The discussion so far would suggest that our goal should not after all be the alleviation of another's poverty or suffering in itself. The first possibility, then, is to conceive of the volunteer aid industry as opening spaces for a range of social encounters between volunteers (often, though not always, middle class) and aid beneficiaries. In such human interaction, perhaps, we and the college student might learn to put aside the philanthropic impulse itself, to continuously reorient ourselves to asking how, if not as benefactors, we can apprehend and interact with the people we meet in these spaces of aid and Otherness. We might, perhaps, witness others' living alternatives to the fierce self-sufficiency so valued in the highly industrialized nations. Thus the first of two possible ways we might be creative consumers of aid volunteering is by replacing the benefactor/giving approach produced by the volunteer experience with something else, something such as Gayatri Spivak's "face-to-face ethical encounter." Kapoor reminds us that Spivak writes of such encounters as replacing the commonplace depictions of needy aid beneficiaries as generated for us by the aid world. Moreover, Kapoor adds, this could involve a good deal of not fully understanding. As she writes, "Coming to terms with the Other's difference is precisely reckoning with the impossibility of knowing it, accepting that it exceeds our understanding or expectations" (p. 122). Says Kapoor, accepting that we cannot fully understand also means rereading the "non-speakingness" of subalterns or aid beneficiaries. Where we might at first read silence as ignorance or stubbornness, says Kapoor, we need to learn to read it instead as a "[form] of resistance and agency," as a "refusal to answer or submit to the gaze and questioning of"... the aid world.

This essay opened with an evocation of freedom. Can engagements such as those described above be a journey toward freedom (and for the moment I am still focusing on the college student,

and not on the beneficiaries of the aid world, for their stories would require a different discussion)? Anthropologist James Laidlaw (2002) offers us an unusual perspective on freedom, one that we might bend to our purposes here. Laidlaw writes that we need to shake up our views of what counts as freedom. Specifically, he says, we need ways of describing "how freedom is exercised in different social contexts and cultural traditions" (p. 311) – he refers to this as an anthropology of freedom.[14] He then evokes Michel Foucault's description of self-fashioning or "techniques of the self," including "our response to invitations or injunctions to make oneself into a certain kind of person" (p. 322). In an unusual reading Laidlaw writes that for Foucault such deliberate self-fashioning is indeed a practice of freedom in the modern world, and an ethical practice of freedom furthermore. Laidlaw cites the French philosopher: "'Ethics', Foucault writes, 'is the conscious (*réfléchie*) practice of freedom.'" (p. 324). Laidlaw sees Foucault as suggesting that "[o]ne can have more or less freedom, and it takes different forms, in different historical situations" (p. 323). And further, "[Foucault] speaks not of achieving but of exercising freedom." In this spirit, can we posit that for U.S. college students seeking volunteer experiences in a globalizing world, freedom might be pursued through a self-fashioning project involving exposure and interaction with people whose lives are very different from their own along with continuous self-reflection during that process? The goal is not to "aid" the beneficiaries of the aid industry, nor to accomplish anything "measurable" at all, but rather to play witness and in the process to fire one's imagination, to plant seeds of possible future transformation, to influence one's own future decisions. Can the above creative consumption of the purchased volunteer experience be, for students, also a practice of freedom, where freedom is conceived of as a deliberate self-fashioning, a conscious attempt to learn in the presence of people who live without the comforts of middle class life or the mostly taken-for-granted quality of everyday life in highly industrialized societies? Can we conceive of freedom as a freedom from the limitations of middle class-ness itself exercised as a process of self reflection and self-(re)fashioning?

If the hope here is for a transformation of us, the middle class volunteer, what about the aid beneficiary herself or himself? It would be a problem all over again if we were to make of this beneficiary a romanticized, innocent Other, primarily stimulus for our own self-(re)fashioning. Volunteers are likely to interact, surely, with all kinds of individuals and groups – the subaltern, Spivak might remind us, is irretrievably heterogenous.[15] We will need a most adult appreciation of human complexity, and we will need to recognize also that all our lines are blurry and fluid. For

[14] Laidlaw recounts Friedrich Nietzsche's historical account of the past ten thousand years, of the shift from a pre-moral to a moral society, as a result of what he calls the "slave revolt". In the pre-moral world, "good" and "bad" were simply great versus inadequate/low/bad. After the slave revolt, which emerges when the "*ressentiment*" of the weak becomes creative and effects social change, a new set of ideas, the slaves' ideas, about good and bad emerge, such that: "What had been good characteristics [of the nobles and of social superiors] were now 're-touched, re-interpreted, and re-viewed through the poisonous eye of *ressentiment*' ... where force, vitality, and formidableness had been inseparable natural expressions of strength, they are now seen, as if strength had the choice of not being strong, as 'aggression' ... Weakness now becomes, in the new moral sense, good" (pp. 319-320). This transformation is fuelled by guilt. Guilt's origins in turn lie in the non- or pre-moral notion of debt. But whereas debt was based on notions of equivalence, "Guilt cannot be got rid of simply by repayment. Instead, it leaves a residue of 'inner pain'" (p. 320) that is essential to morality. Furthermore, Laidlaw suggests, in Indic religions and in karma (his work's main focus), "*ressentiment* is redirected, as an ascetic impulse, against yourself" (p. 320).

[15] See, among others, these ethnographic discussions complicating notions of the innocent native (thinking instead with terms such as 'canny native'): Gefou-Madianou (2010); Hernandez-Reguant (2008).

example, does every U.S. college student fit that role of a rich global citizen visiting poor global citizens? In a strict sense, surely not. Students in universities in the West hail from different cultural, economic backgrounds. And what about middle and upper middle class people in developing countries? In them, college students feel they meet people with whom they seem to share something of the perception that they live in a place catching up with the West. Yes, they do indeed complicate any clean binaries – rich/poor; volunteer/beneficiary; Master/Slave. They require that we displace the lines of this division, thinking not of Global North versus Global South alone but also of perceived distinctions of class and race, and so on.

Yet all the while we can maintain, when students travel or work as volunteers in the aid industry, they cannot shake off the nametag of the American or Western European college student. This subjectivity travels with them and frames all their interactions. When they introduce themselves in the spaces of aid work and development, there is no way around their having to account for being a college student from the Global North. The burden of embodying the world's inequalities, often in their very corporeality (one Filipino-American student spoke in my class of being wrenchingly struck by how much taller and muscular his American diet made him than the Filipinos he met in Manila), feels heavy for many, even unbearable.

This takes me to the second possibility for how we might conceive of being volunteers in the aid industry. For this, I would like to borrow an insight from Faisal Devji (2011) writing of Mohandas Gandhi's approach to other people's suffering. Devji describes how, in the face of a famine and people dying of drought, Gandhi elected not to offer a helping hand to the hungry, but rather to train the spotlight on the responsible national government and to thus lift the problem to the "necessary political plane".[16] Writes Devji:

> So [Gandhi's] response to suffering was not in the first instance to ameliorate it but instead to make sure that those who had been wronged behaved like moral agents and not victims, thus allowing them to enter into a political relationship with their persecutors. (pp. 272-273)

Gandhi's politics went a step further, Devji points out. He sought to make of injustice and suffering an occasion not only to energize a political encounter between the powerful and the dispossessed, but also to transform the morality of the persecutor, the Master. Thus Devji continues: "[The persecutors], after all, were themselves in need of a moral transformation, for which their victims were to be made responsible, preferably without the intervention of any third party" (p. 273).

What would it mean for a North American or Western European college volunteer to abandon the role of assistant to the poor and needy and take on instead the part of witness to – and, perhaps, facilitator of – others' political engagement with their national government? It would be another essay to theorize if and how the flexing of one's citizenship in radically democratic ways might be viewed as a contemporary form of collective interdependence, in turn suggesting the possibility of new forms of loyalty that cross national boundaries, forged by countless ethical encounters in the spaces opened up, if necessary, by the aid industry itself. Yet, it is just such preliminary theorizing

[16] Nirmal Kumar Bose's reflections on this very incident, as cited in Devji (2011).

that allows us to reimagine the international volunteer experience as a crucible for some emergent form of citizenship in an as-yet unknown global polity.

For all too easily, as so many now have persuasively argued, the individual – and with especial harm, the aid beneficiary – in today's neo-liberal world is granted no political selfhood but rather reduced either to an economic self (whose income should be raised, or whose productivity enhanced) or to a biological organism (whose body is to be properly vaccinated, operated upon, and fed).

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